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Demographic and social statistics: social statistics

Social statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

This report is submitted in accordance with the request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session.[a] It describes the activities to be carried out by the United Nations Statistics Division in response to the expressed need for a more systematic development of social statistics, improved measurement of disability and the preparation of a poverty compendium on best practices. Proposed actions by the Commission are contained in paragraph 16.

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), chap. I, sect. A.

* E/CN.3/2003/1.

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I. Background

1. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session reviewed activities undertaken in the area of social statistics and recommended actions to be taken.[1] Inter alia the Commission:

(a) Recognized the need for a more systematic development of social statistics;

(b) Noted the need for standard instruments and comparable indicators on disability;

(c) Encouraged the production of a compendium on poverty measurement.

2. The present report presents activities by the Statistics Division in collaboration with City Groups that address the issues listed above.

II. Expert group meeting on social statistics

3. As an initial step towards systematic development of social statistics, an expert group meeting in collaboration with the Siena group is being planned to review social statistics systems at the country, regional and international levels, examining:

(a) The organization of social statistics programmes at the country, national and international levels;

(b) Coordination issues that arise at each of those levels;

(c) Weaknesses in current social statistics programmes;

(d) Linkages between social, economic and other statistics.

4. The expert group meeting will also identify areas of emerging social concern and recommend methods for collecting and compiling relevant statistics in a systematic and coherent manner.

5. It is envisaged that the expert group meeting will make a series of concrete proposals for the development of social statistics at the national, regional and international levels with respect to the following:

(a) Systems of social statistics;

(b) Coordination of social statistics programmes;

(c) Statistical capacity-building;

(d) Collaboration between data producers and users;

(e) Ways of harmonizing definitions, concepts and methods to facilitate the use of multiple data sources and to improve the comparability of social statistics.

6. As part of the input to the work of the expert group meeting, the United Nations Statistics Division is preparing detailed reviews of the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection and dissemination procedures on the following areas of social statistics: household composition, families and living arrangements, economic characteristics of household members (as obtained from censuses) and population by age and sex.

III. Disability measurement

7. At its thirty-third session, in welcoming the formation of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, the Commission noted the need for standard instruments and indicators on disability and the importance of validating and reconciling data collected by different organizations.[1] In this regard, the United Nations Statistics Division is supporting the work of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics in developing a small set(s) of general disability measures (questions) suitable for use in censuses and sample surveys to generate basic information on disability throughout the world.

8. The current work in which the Statistics Division is involved pertains to the development of two matrices, one conceptual and the other empirical, that cross-classify the purposes of the measure (question) against a typology of characteristics of the questions such as the domain of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*, severity, aetiology and duration. These two matrices are intended to help in identifying gaps that exist in disability measurement and help direct future work in developing internationally comparable measures of disability.

9. The Division will continue to work with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics in developing a methodology for measuring disability through population censuses and surveys.

IV. Poverty statistics

10. Regarding poverty measurement, the Division plans to prepare a compendium of best practices in 2004/2005 in close cooperation with the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics. The objective is to describe existing approaches to poverty measurement and to share practical experiences. Particular emphasis will be given to the poverty statistics and indicators necessary to measure progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

V. Other activities

A. International collection of disability statistics

11. Data on disability have been maintained in the United Nations Disability Statistics Database (DISTAT), which was first developed in the late 1980s and updated in the late 1990s. The most recent update in 2001 provides only statistics on the prevalence of disability by age and sex.

12. The collection of data on disability has not been part of the established routine collection of data by the Statistics Division from national statistics offices, except as part of the data collection for the 1993 *Demographic Yearbook* Special Issue on Ageing.[2] Making statistics on disability part of the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection and dissemination would do the following:

(a) Regularize the collection of these data;

(b) Integrate the statistics on disability into a larger *Demographic Yearbook* database, thereby improving their utility by linking them with statistics on other topics;

(c) Improve the dissemination of disability data by making them available on a regular basis.

B. Housing statistics

13. While countries collect and produce data on housing stock and housing characteristics through population and housing censuses, such information has not been compiled and disseminated in full in the *Compendium of Human Settlements Statistics*. The Statistics Division therefore plans to review its recent practices in the collection and dissemination of housing and human settlement statistics with a view to improving the coverage of countries and topics in the 2006 *Compendium*.

C. Gender statistics

14. The Statistics Division is producing a technical report reviewing national statistics on gender for the period 1955 to 2005. A review of all *Demographic Yearbook* topics covered by age and sex in its questionnaires and tabulations is currently under way. In addition, the Division is planning to merge the web site on *World's Women* statistics and indicators[3] with the web site on social indicators[4] by 2004 and to improve the user-friendliness of the web site.

D Publications

15. Publications produced by the Statistics Division on social statistics which have been released or submitted for publication since the last meeting of the Commission are listed in the annex.

VI. Proposed actions by the Commission

16. The Statistical Commission is asked to do the following:

(a) Comment on issues to be examined by the expert group meeting on the systematic development of social statistics;

(b) Endorse the proposal to collect statistics on disability on a regular basis through the *Demographic Yearbook* collection system;

(c) Endorse the proposal to prepare a compendium of best practices in poverty statistics.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), paras. 15 (b), 18 (b) and 21 (a) (i).

[2] United Nations (1993). *Demographic Yearbook. Special issue: Population Ageing and the Situation of the Elderly Persons*, United Nations publication, sales No. E/F.92.XIII.9.

[3] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/ww2000/tables.htm.

[4] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/social/default.htm.

Annex

List of publications of the United Nations Statistics Division in social statistics

Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.Y/10
Sales No. E.01.XVII.15

Collection of Economic Characteristics in Population Censuses
Technical report, ST/ESA/STAT/119

Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/89 (Forthcoming)

Guide to Producing Statistics on Time-Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/93 (Forthcoming)